

ANOBIUM: VOLUME ONE [SUMMER 2011]



A N O B I U M



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2011**

ANOBIUM
VOLUME 1 (SUMMER 2011)
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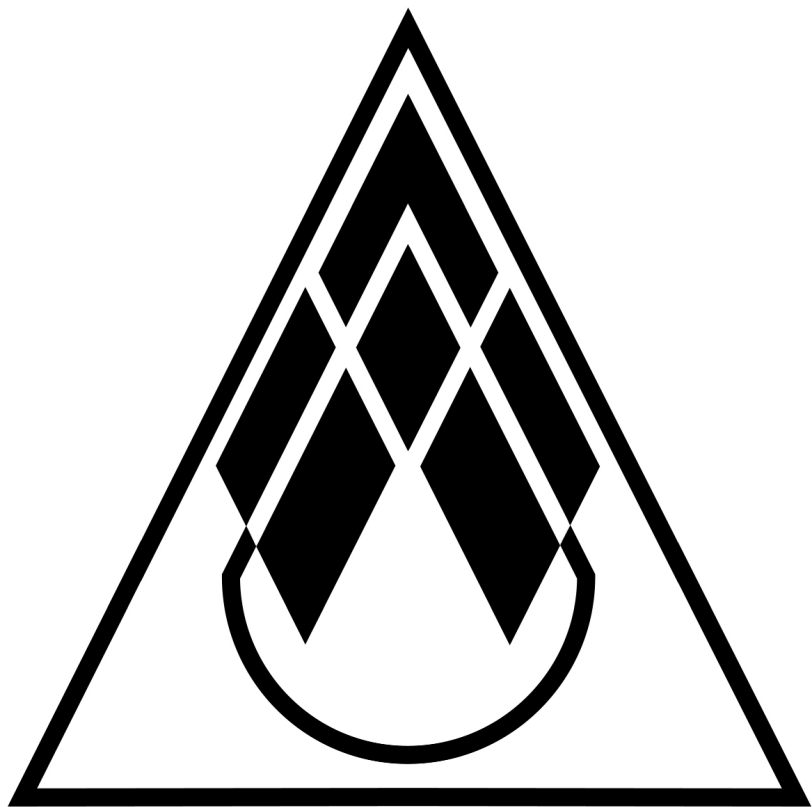
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PERPETUAL SUMMER

ANOBIUM: VOLUME 1 (SUMMER 2011)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

“Mary J. Levine”	1	Letter from the Editor
Ben Nardolilli	4	Only Discernible
Bethany Minton	5	The Notsos
J. S. MacLean	8	Sex and the Single Slime-Mold Marshall McLuhan Joshtradamus
Thomas Mundt	12	Several-Horse Town
E. Jones	15	The Salt in Their Teeth
Eric Evans	17	Untitled #187 A Carrot, Said the Good Captain
Graham Tugwell	19	The Coursing of the Quisp
Jennifer Collins	25	Flails in Heartbeats
Meredith Turits	26	Tracks
James Payne	28	Am Appy R.I.P. 2003(?)-2011(?) Bushwick, NYC
Susan Yount	30	Cusp Catastrophe Hyperbolic Umbilic Catastrophe Spontaneous Symmetry Breaking
Stephanie Plenner	34	Instructionals
Ricky Garni	36	SALT’NPEPPERPHOBIA

William Doreski	37	To a Pillar of Society The Vowels I Often Mistake...
Claire McCurdy	39	La Giudecca...
Rich Ives	42	How to Locate Your Equivalent... The Angle of the Moonlight Sunlight, Another Shadow Implement for the Aerial...
Jonathan Greenhouse	49	Sebastian and the Accumulation... Sebastian and the Slaughterhouse... Sebastian and the Heart Surgeons Sebastian, Samantha... Sebastian's Ecstasy is Short-Lived
Luke Irwin	54	The Kid and I
Laura Carter	59	Who is the King of Birds? XXYYZ

* * *

ANOBIUM ARTIST FEATURES PRESENTS

Joe Meno	63	Everywhere: There Are Chapels
Anobium & Joe Meno	65	A Conversation

* * *

CLOSING INFORMATION

Author Biographies	73
Staffing, Printing and Ordering	75

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See page 75 for more information.*

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

“VERMONT” - I would like to begin this volume with an admission: I do not exist. I am an amalgamation of thought and knuckles and corporate policy. Who else would be able to tolerate an existence like this? You will read my name and think that I seem familiar, but I assure you that I am nothing more than an indelicate composition. I am your monthly board report. I am a memorial.

My non-existence precludes my insouciance, which is to say, I have nothing to prove. I am the burden of a midnight deadline and the pleasures that connect us to our places and our mothers. Most importantly, I have no power. I cannot drink a milkshake. I have no heartbeat. I am a nervous system. I am a category. I sit on top of the masthead encased by quotation marks, and that is all I am.

So take me in that way, for what I am: a book. This book. Words on the page. Presenting to you *Anobium: Volume 1*. A collection of some of the finest and strangest poetry and prose by those who have proven themselves willing to traverse the immeasurable rift between earth and etherea. The writers here are bound together by the idea that what we experience is only a fraction of a greater metaphysical formula. Woodpulp, epoxy, aqueous dyes. Hold a match to this book and it will burn, though together we are flameproof. You can't kill an assumption.

The brass tacks: we received over 300 submissions for our inaugural volume. A few of these were great. A few of these were exceptional. These rarefied ones are what we're providing here in Volume 1. We invested a couple of extra bucks to secure an ISBN and LCCN because we think great literature should be easily accessible. We plan on integrating printed releases with digital reproductions, and in the future we have contests, chapbooks and other gems tucked away. Buy now and forever hold your piece.

Anobium started \$100 in the red. Thanks to the efforts of friends, families, strangers and potential enemies, we raised \$1,300 spacebux produce what you're holding now. All the while, we had to answer why. Why are you printing? Especially in this day and age, with all these gadgets and gizmos and thingamajigs?

Feel this weight in your hands. Watch it wrinkle and swell on the table in your humid bedroom. Bend it, draw in it, rip it apart. Hide it behind your pillow. That's why.

But before you put it in your time capsule, read it. *Volume 1* is full of fantastic writing, some of it from greenhorns and some of it from the vets (never forget). We're also especially thankful to Joe Meno for giving us time for an interview and a story to publish along with it. Our team of volunteers put in billions of seconds to help compile this volume and we're excited about the future, even if 'the future' is just an empty concept. Better empty than never.

The sun is setting over Treadwell Bay as I sit here in my Holy Pyramid somewhere above Adam's Landing, where I've never been, north of where I never graduated, five-thousand miles away from the place where I was never born. It's what most people call the realm of Calculation and Parody. You'll be hearing more from me in the future, but take it with a spoonful of salt. Look me up in Vermont. You won't find me. Maybe this explains what Anobium is? Yggdrasil asked me to write this.

- "Mary J. Levine"

PS: Pay special attention to *Rich Ives, Jonathan Greenhause and Susan Yount*. They're onto something.

BOVINE GLUE OMEN

ANOBIUM
VOLUME ONE: BEGIN

(CONSIDER THE SHAPE OF YOUR PERPETUAL SUMMER)

ONLY DISCERNIBLE

BY BEN NARDOLILLI

Source of light,
I give you the paradigm of running water.

Source of light,
I give you license and patents.

Source of light,
I give you the death of swans.

Source of light,
I give you regard as a certainty.

Source of light,
I give you a leap to a promised land.

Source of light,
I give you the right outdoor equipment.

Source of light,
I give you a poorly timed messiah.

Source of light,
I give you scarce resources.

THE NOTSOS

BY BETHANY MINTON

You May Us.

What parallel courses did the boy and the girl follow returning?

Wait and you shall be shown.

Shall we then begin at the airport?

Certainly. The reasoning behind the second return to the airport was drawn from its introduction to the boy and girl. The first time the girl flew into the airport it was the day before her birthday and she was happy. The second time the girl flew into the airport it was the fourth of July and the girl was exhausted and willing to be content for awhile. Seven weeks approximate, though the boy would round it up to three months because at that time time worked differently for them. But that is another story.

What made her so certain on the 16th of May 2007?

She knew the boy was waiting for her and she was more excited to see him than smoke a cigarette.

What made her so uncertain her second arrival?

She could not find the boy and decided to smoke a cigarette before looking for him further.

How does this course parallel later events?

She would resent it greatly when the boy indicated he was more interested in pot before sex than sex before pot or sex before sex.

What was her part in the non-battle?

A passive aggressive response to the fact that the boy got his rocks off

without getting hers went to get a towel as he was prone to do and when she began to masturbate herself the boy was still not paying attention and she rolled away from him. She would learn how far lack of communication goes days later when the boy indicated that he was disgruntled with her for not 'cuddling' (she hates that word as much as 'potential') with him after they had sex that very same night. By then she would have realized to stop trying to explain to him how far back Cause and Effect goes (that was his favorite White Stripes song at the time which she would also see as a very bad omen and one of her most fulfilling efforts at showing rather than telling the boy with his mother in the car exactly what Mr. White meant in the song for as you can see he wrote while pretending to be very happily married to a super-model named Karen as the girl saw clearly) because it only made him resent her further so she drew all that observation back into herself once again to keep the boy safe and from exploding as he saw it.

How did the girl learn for a time that she really did love the boy?

Because she started mowing the lawn for her father for the boy listening to Aesop Rock and had very good time working her muscles so much so that she would prefer a manual job opposed to a receptionary.

How might polar opposites be described?

She believed the proper and exact method of making a comparison between one and zero one sunny October morn where she woke up to face the pesticide man and cried a little in her heart for daddy long legs had not moments before dissappointedly with still the weight of him on her mind who she had recently grown accustomed to shouting even in public 'get the fuck out of my head you ass' minus the hole of course and the basic premise of her morning mathematics alluded to by waking to the beautiful split Odessa face C finally noticed after eight weeks of living that she had most carefully selected her each little and perfect kittenish and or cat on their warm and lovely including natures but he on the other hand had emphasized to each vet and specialist during the demise of the David Bowie alien canine that was so loved and also split eyed instead of faced that he had inherited the angel by accident and in both instances according to each by that meaning girl and dog who was a boy not a bitch and neither was the girl for the boy both were angels he killed them with passive aggression and inherited their

love by almosting or accident as a one would say the zero in her heart knew she had found the boy and left the boy when ask as is the duty of angels and so too the dog had arrived for the boy and made the boy happy until it was time for him to leave he thought it was safe that he had left the boy love protection enough in the girl but individual love was still working on the heart of the boy which may yet turn out to be a beautiful thing though the girl will now tell the boy he is right in her head each time he appears unwelcome Yes, you are an asshole, I finally agree, minus the hole, unless you've got to M yet, I see you will, she having more angelic features than me. Δ

SEX AND THE SINGLE SLIME-MOLD

BY J. S. MACLEAN

amoeboid alive plant animal not food bacteria bog rot
 up methane burp (((June night excite firework
 down slow drought stress
 cyclic AMP secretes radiocast))))) word out
 call single molds all
 contract exude e lec tro chem i cal
 amps am pli fy sig nal
 synchronize swarmflock
 transmit receive undulate long short
 constrict distend contract e x t e nd
 b r o a dcast unison come press
 ones approach middle.point rhythm pulse
 center ((())) converge meet mix one slugmass creep
 raise body fruit bulbous stalk sporangium tumid ripe
 erupt spore windgust soar afar foreignswamp
 wrecked grex left
 cycle sex once more
 sol o

MARSHALL MCLUHAN

BY J.S. MACLEAN

Should not McLuhan have said,
“The medium is a message.”
like in Armstrong’s understood
but possibly medium messed,
“This is one small step for a man...”?
One was just and certainly an astronaut
who walked where all have seen
and the other a ‘monumental intellect’
who said the printed word stayed
“the return to the Africa within”;
that total eclipse of oral man
in “...the automatism and rigidity
of a non-literate community
in its non-personal collectivity”.
McLuhan never walked with oral man
whom he assumed had no imagination
even if they most certainly
looked up in wonder at the moon.
A rank message is launched
in the staging of a mankind.

JOSHTRADAMUS

BY J.S. MACLEAN

The day preceding, a cloud
will appear organic,
like spatial fungus
or yet another type of beetle.

Life will seem as nugatory
as the paw imprints
of a fisher kit
on ferny moss at a river's dawn.

Time will counter
and none will notice,
not even us,
who can taste the future.

Strings of stuff
will slither like floaters
that once were letters,
into an eclipse pupil.

Space will shiver,
its surface cramping,
and cancelation,
a lastful sounding.



SEVERAL-HORSE TOWN

BY THOMAS MUNDT

You're always going on and on about this being a one-horse town. You're always the horse, the one horse. The only horse.

Our sleepy little hamlet met its horse quota. It began and ended with you. Et cetera, et cetera.

I catch it. Your drift, that is. I catch your fucking drift. But you know what? I happen to think your drift is way the fuck off. (I'm still talking about your horse drift here.)

I happen to think this is a several-horse town.

* * *

I'm a horse. McNaughton up the way? He's a horse. Crawlspace? That Asian guy with all the coaxial cables in the flatbed of his Ram? Horse, and horse. That's four horses right there, and I'm not even really trying that hard.

Shall I continue?

* * *

Do you think for a second that our town's founding fathers drew up the original metes and bounds with a singular horse (i.e. you) in mind? Fuck no. They may not have had the fortitude to be forty-niners but they got in on the Bronze Rush on the ground floor, made a fair amount of coin off all the cathouses and knick-knackereries they built around the perimeter of Pigeon Forks. Peddled ass and grandfather clocks so their children and their children's children wouldn't have to. Took all the proceeds and got nice and cozy with some Lakota tribeswomen from Sugar Gulch, and that about takes us to the present.

Point is, they did all that so that future fucking horses, horses plural, could share in the bounty, so they could better the existing horses through education (and a few clutch vaccinations) and replace the dying ones. Don't you get it?

* * *

Do we live in a small town? Yes. Will our children continue to fall into retention ponds at a rate nearly three times the national average? Most likely.

Will the exterior of the Wentworth Savings and Loan on Locust Road always bear the signature design of a late-'80s Pizza Hut, years after its franchisor up and split like the atom? What am I, clairvoyant?

But to suggest that you're the only horse in a town of approximately seven-hundred. I mean, do you hear how crazy that sounds?

* * *

It's a numbers game, really. You round up enough people and you're bound to get a few horses, just by accident. You act as if your horsehood is Halley's Fucking Comet, coming to town every seventy-five to seventy-six years so us yokels can pony up (get it, Secretariat?) for some glowsticks, pound the energy drink du jour, and head out to the front lawn to gawk at your fiery fucking descent.

Please. Get the fuck over yourself.

* * *

Come to think of it, I'm not entirely sold on you being a horse to begin with. I mean, let's say for argument's sake that you're right, that we find ourselves at the epicenter of your precious drifter burg. And, let's assume a tribunal has been assembled and assigned the task of filling the first horse vacancy said burg has faced in, well, ever. Now, out of all the potential horse candidates—you, me, Dean Beano of Dean Beano Hyundai, that Karen lady with the Pomeranians, the Gutfreunds' newborn (the one that shows so much promise), and whole host of others—they're just going to summarily anoint you horse? The horse, in a town with a max horse capacity of one?

And what exactly have you done? Granted, you did a pretty good tape job when we painted that rec room that one time. (Emphasis on that one time.) But one good tape job does not a horse resume make. The way I see it, it takes years of sustained excellence to be the horse in a one-horse town.

We're talking Dan Marino-style here.

* * *

Look, I'm not saying you could never be the horse in a one-horse town. That light shines bright within you, without question. You'd make a positively fantastic single horse over in Raccoon Flats, maybe even Possum Springs. (Where's Possum Springs? You know perfectly well that it's off Route 37,

where the old Titty Shack used to be. Or have you forgotten Lyle and Zima's wedding completely?)

But that's not where we're at, be it physically, spiritually, or sexually. Where we're at, my friend, is horse country. Look around you. Did you know our town boasts more graduates of DeVry's world-renowned TV/VCR Repair Program than any other municipality in the continental forty-eight? Are you aware of how many Olympic-level horseshoe tossers live on your mail route alone? (This of course assumes the IOC makes horseshoes an Olympic event in our lifetime, but this is a mere formality.)

It's called civic pride. It'd be nice if you took a little now and again.

* * *

I don't know how many horses are in this town. Could be dozens, hundreds. Doesn't matter. More than one should suffice for the purposes of this discussion.

All I'm saying is that you can't just walk around like you're the only alpha mare in the entire tri-county area. You have to recognize Black Beauty when you see him, even if he's just in your brain stable.

If you don't, you'll just be one horse with many towns, none you'd care to call yours and yours alone. Δ

THE SALT IN THEIR TEETH

BY E. JONES

The man in my story has characteristics that justify his temperament. He is either too moody or too giving, depending on how he is portrayed. His scalp is like something, his face a familiar shade of some familiar color. He is detailed.

I have named him Raphael, but this will most likely change.

He speaks like this: What's that in your rain? No one knows what he means but they listen as he says: I'm speaking to you, boy. I'm walking by your house or I'm gliding barefoot again.

It's more interesting to hold off on the big reveal that he is clinically insane. You are now informed, and your suspended disbelief is now replaced by your acceptance of this new reality. To continue I might begin:

"He returns home a critic. He marries. It is a pity that sometimes, when others watch, they sit together."

But I don't like it. I scrap it, so I say:

"Never has doubt swelled on the heat of seasons, on the day lilies that grow there." I go on in my own way and express myself through allegory, fitting a simile into a sentence that felt as though it was missing something—a simile, perhaps.

I drum the fingers of my dominant hand on the fat of my belly and read words out-loud, words like 'bone' and 'mouth' and 'indulge.'

"It is a wildflower; it may smell sweet, but candy tastes better," and I smile at my wit.

I may use a phrase such as every day, Germans digest and they belch and they swallow their history and they evacuate their bowels. If I did, I would say it with force, as though I know first-hand. I alleviate the expertly crafted tension: "It's bright today, this autumn sky, full and round..." I would pause and start again, but by this time winter would sound more appropriate and so I would change it. "Winter is definitely better."

Then I say: Forgive me for my tongue and the space in my throat. Forgive me for the area below my eye, the unsightly skin of my head. (Note the use of forgive.)

The main character, Raphael, it is discovered, has become sick of deferred success. The idea of it. The thoughts of it. The nights spent awake.

I will eventually write, "I don't want to judge."

I don't want to judge.

And there it is.

In my story, the city itself is washed in white. The inhabitants are fitted with a sense of timing and thoughts of weekends. Mischievous in ways. Dependent. The wind pushes cans. The people say things like _____ and _____. The wind blows again, whistling. Men and women pick spots on one another and never look up. It's a happy arrangement.

We park our bikes where flowers should grow. We walk calmly from here to there and note the trees.

"Here's an oak, if I imagine. A birch if I really think about it."

There is a love interest. I say that she was a painter and a whore, but never at the same time. Living this way was equally as exciting as finding something buried in sand, something gold.

My social commentary: There are women too orange for the season, baked in light and rubbed in oils they've never had to buy themselves. Bejeweled. Yellow-haired. They've learned to get along by the salt in their teeth.

To impress them I italicize this: *This time last year I held the city of Budapest in one hand. It wasn't as heavy as you'd think. I looked at Budapest and I said thank you so much and where would I be without you. I explained to him that it was because of the women in Budapest that I thanked him; because of their short skirts, their see-through blouses. It was because of their sweaters that can work for any season.*

When I lost Budapest under a couch, I promised myself not to take on such heavy responsibilities. I then sat down to knit a quilt for a Haitian church in a county of the globe. I told them everything, the people in the church, and for five days I sewed and knotted and made my way to far corners in hopes of warmth and comfort.

In the end they blessed me with the gift of Philadelphia and I held it in one hand for all the world to see and the people liked me and told my stories with equal parts truth and hyperbole.

But they don't buy it, so I shout this time: *When I was 18, I remained faithful to fairy tales and unwavering love and I lit the flame of my ambition and it never faltered and I loved and I caught my breath and I respected the compassion in others. I gardened. It was in a rush of opportunity that I leapt from my normal self and into California. I played with dogs, and I got ready, and I visualized dimples the size of thumbprints. I still do this, but I don't write it down, and in this way it's new to me daily.*

And they call me Jack, The Tragedy, and something lives in my basement.

They keep walking. Δ

UNTITLED #187

BY ERIC EVANS

I've seen my wife in her goddess form,
multi-breasted and swinging by the knees,
from a trapeze bar, my mind a kaleidoscope
of images and options, only half of which
suitable for public consumption, such is
the way she alters me so on a regular
basis, rearranges me with the deftest
of touches and simplest of words.

I've watched her crouch in a lioness
stance, coiled to spring in fierce
protection of our young, teeth bared
and sharp, beautiful in her primal form,
arms flung wide to encounter the world
on negotiated terms, bearing logic like
a sharpshooter, a marksman's aim but
a caretaker's heart.

I've seen her breathe fire and consume
the moon, realign the planets through
calm suggestion and stare down the
steadiest of fears developing behind
my often-bleary eyes. And once, in
a dream, I saw my wife chased by
a gang of angry deaf mutes, signing
furiously as they blocked her retreat
and anticipated her moves. And yet
I never once had the slightest doubt
that she would somehow prevail.

A CARROT, SAID THE GOOD CAPTAIN

BY ERIC EVANS

A carrot, said the good captain,
is as close as a rabbit gets to a
diamond, the elusive prize against
which we measure his long-eared
worth, born as he is naked and
blind and helpless, aware of nothing
but his instincts.

This rabbit,
running or at rest, rich or poor,
doesn't know the politics of the
others, their agendas and fears,
has never warred with the hares
across the way or the serious
jackrabbits down by the railroad
tracks. His is a life of reproduction
and food, one followed closely by
the other.

But this rabbit, free
or caged, hunted or safe, has the
gift of clarity and never mind the
stick attached to his reward.
Maybe he has it right and maybe
a diamond is as close as we ever
get to a carrot.

THE COURSING OF THE QUISP

BY GRAHAM TUGWELL

Voices of men.

The bully of boots in the laneways.

The wagging of flashlights along hedgerows, splashing the gable ends of barns and outhouses with long and bright oblations.

Rushing, snuffling, scattery-pattering - hound's paws on gravel.

Come see the Coursing of the Quisp...

The sun would set and she would hide it in a nest of rags, bundle it in a ball of cloth, and keep it safely under her bed and when the tramping of the men's boots became too loud, when the howling of their dogs came too close, she'd take the trembling thing up in her hands, rock it soft and stroke to calm, whispering:

"Come on now, stop... ssshhh now, stop... I won't let anything happen to you."

And low the Quisp would moan, rolling its eyeless face into the folds of its nest, worrying its mouth on the cloth of her dress, and slow she caressed it lest the Quisp be heard, lest her parents follow the gentle keening up the stairs and into her room.

"Sssshhhh now... stop, stop, stop..."

And after an age the marching feet would pass, the panting hounds would bound away, the torchlight would soundless slip along the side of the house, leaving the girl and the Quisp in breathless silence.

Safe again, safe for another night.

* * *

The sun was setting.

"What do you eat?" she asked, kneeling on the floor beside the Quisp and brushing its long black hair with her little finger.

Swinging its skinny legs over the side of her bed it answered by gurgling a soft gibberish, spitting bubbles along the pulpy rim of its long thin mouth.

"Would you like to try some chocolate?" she whispered, "Everyone likes chocolate."

She broke an angled square from the bar and poked it softly into the wet pinkness of the Quisp.

"Nice?" she asked, nodding her encouragement, "Yummy, yes?"

The Quisp chewed noisily, smacking the yumminugget from side to side.

"Bleh," it spat it out, gobbing the melted stuff down its front.

Tutting, she dabbed the Quisp clean with the hem of her dress. "Silly thing—Making a mess of yourself."

The Quisp pulled away from her ministrations, growling: "Mweh. Mweh!"

"Okay, so you don't like chocolate. Well, do you like..." She picked it off the plate, "Strawberries?"

She pushed the end of one into the mouth of the Quisp, and though it took a little gummy bite, it soon retched up the mouthful, sullyng itself again with red pap.

"Oh," she said, "You have to eat *something*. What else have I got...?"

Grimacing, she held up a sliver of a cold white egg and flopped it about in front of the creature.

"What do you think of egg white?"

And with a strange belching sound the Quisp sprang forward and gobbled the egg white out from between her fingers.

She tumbled backwards, holding her bitten hand to her chest - "Careful," she gasped, "you nearly had my finger off!"

The Quisp stood erect upon the bedclothes, greedily chewing the egg, slapping the white pap about its mouthfolds with every sign of enjoyment, quivering with delight when it was swallowed.

"Muh!" it burped, jumping up and down on the bed.

"Muh! Muh!"

"I... I haven't got any more," the girl stammered, "There's no more left!"

"Muh! Muh! Muh! Muh!" it screamed, calves and shins straining.

"Stop," she begged, "Stop - please, the dogs! The dogs will hear you!" and she threw a blanket over the Quisp, tried to hold the struggling thing still.

"Stop," she sobbed, "stop, stop, they'll take you - they'll take you!"

Yet still it shrieked under the blanket. "Muh! Muh! Muh!"

"They'll hear! They'll hear!"

They heard.

The sun is setting as she makes her way home from school, painting the tree tops with fire and casting ink about the ditches.

She hurries home before the dark, before the men and the dogs are loosed.

These last eleven nights: the Coursing of the Quisp.

And on the wind she hears a sickly wheeze and thinking first it is her tired breath, she stops at last and listens.

The sound is coming from a brake of musty nettles along the side of the lane.

And though the world is settling down to dark, she carefully sheathes her hands in sleeves and parts the stinging curtains.

Coughing blood at the foot of a garden wall, she finds it.

The Quisp.

An oval paleness, lying on its side, its pink mouth opening and shutting softly, its thin legs bunched up beneath it. Dirt and blood is in its hair, is on the thickness of its lips.

It has no eyes, but still she feels it is looking up at her.

Pleading.

And the baying of the dogs is a single turn of the lane away.

"It's only a baby," she whispers. "It's only a baby."

Kneeling, she gathers up the Quisp in the lap of her dress.

It sighs, but does not move.

"I won't let them hurt you," she whispers. "I'll hide you from them. I'll keep you safe."

She runs home, the sounds of the Coursing close on her heels.

* * *

The sun in setting sends a dying length of light through the landing window, melting dust to motes of gold, and making shadows of the men mounting stairs towards the room.

In the doormouth he stands, the massing curve of gut occluding sun til no more than a rib of ruddy light illumines the girl; thin, gaunt, dark-eyed.

Afraid.

And the Quisp; bubbling soft from its nest upon the bed.

She cannot see the fat man's face, but she can hear his voice, low and laboured.

"You shouldn't... have done that... girl."

Breath clacking wet with fat, with grease: "Shouldn't have interfered... with things... you don't understand."

And heads are coming round and crowding shadows, looming into light.

Fear now made a physical thing and sitting heavy on her throat, a thrombus grown in the heart of her, she backs towards the bed, shaking hands reaching for her ward.

Moving to shield it, the red of the sun draws a slow curve cross the white cloth of her nightdress.

"I won't let you have it," she whispers and her fingers close upon the softness of the creature, holding it struggling, bubbling, close to her.

A movement in the dark. The fat man has extended a hand. "Give it. Don't make us have to take it."

"You've no right," she mumbles, "It's just a baby. Just a lost, little thing."

"Give it!" screams the fat man, and the dark shapes move closer, blocking out the last light.

"No. It was scared," she gasps, "It was scared. It was scared."

She turns, hunching, struggles to keep her creature away from the...

It bites her fingers.

Hard.

She screeches, flailing her stricken hand through the air. The Quisp; snarling; mauling the bloodied digits, flung back and forth, a boneless rag, in frantic, jerking pain she dashes the creature off the bed, off the bed post, slapped it scattering across the locker, dully against the corner of the wardrobe, again and again.

And as the men chuckle heartily it bites, bites, and she thrashes, she howls "Get it off me. Get it off meeeee!" until a violent flick of her arm sends the Quisp across the room, heavily crunching against the far wall, falling with a thump upon the carpet.

It coughs, and a bloody fingertip skips lightly across the floor.

Slumped on the edge of her bed, she looks at the Quisp, limp and spluttering against the skirting board. When she speaks even she can barely hear her voice...

"But I helped it."

"I helped it."

She clasps the butt of her severed finger, bright blood spitting down her front, a widening soak of red.

The Quisp is wheezing, its feet move slowly.

"Stupid girl," the fat man growls as he squats beside the wounded creature, lifting it carefully, tenderly.

“Don’t...” a dull word, half-hearted. Her eyes are losing their focus, her face its colour.

The fat man is stroking the Quisp cradled in his arms, running his calloused fingers along its lips, through its hair. “It wants this,” he purrs.

And the Quisp is passed into the eager hands of another man.

“It runs to be caught.”

And laughing softly now, it is passed on to another.

“It loves it. Oh, it loves it.”

And another.

“The tease...the sweet, sweet tease...”

And the men make the Quisp giggle, they make it go ‘pop’ with their fingers.

“Making us all run.”

The kiss it.

They kiss the Quisp.

* * *

The sun has set.

She sits, weeping softly, the hot blood on her nightdress cooling slowly.

“I did nothing wrong. I just wanted to help...”

And she hears the laughter of men and the sound of their boots upon the stairs.

And she hears the baying of the hounds.

And she hears the bubbling giggle of the Quisp.

The tease. Δ



JVL

FLAILS IN HEARTBEATS

BY JENNIFER COLLINS

The soil crumbles
 beneath my left heel
 and I slip down
 inches in a moment
 (as your lips rest speculating and tacky beneath mine in an
undecision of where to move while my eyes are closed and falling in front of
yours on their knees)
And one jeweled sandal
 flies echoing out
 into the canyon behind me
 my left foot without any purchase
 (as I feel one of your nails pick softly at the hole in the waistline
of my jeans, a threat coming loose at the crook of your thumb that meant to
tug me closer)
As my right foot slips
 closer to the edge
 toes fighting at sand
 that's on your side.

TRACKS

BY MEREDITH TURITS

They said they were going to turn the old rail tracks into new ones. That they were going to pick out the weeds that covered the metal, scrape off the rust, and put in new trolleys so that people could move from A to B more easily. The project was to start in a month, so until then, the tracks would lay as they always had: the foundation for constellations of dandelions, and my bed atop the stones and the dirt.

I chose to make my bed there because no one would bother me. They, the same they who decided to replace the tracks, told everyone that the area was too dangerous. Infested with who-knew-what. That the decay wasn't beautiful. A breeding ground for disease. They said it was where the kids from the projects found their first needles. They said that the cops watched it day and night. They said enough that nobody went near them. Not the hipsters with their cameras, not the junkies from the projects, not the scientists, and definitely not the police. The tracks were the only space in the city guaranteed to be vacant. I chose the tracks because they were the closest thing to the meaning of "home."

For the entire summer I slept there. First next to the rails, and then across them, and then in between them. And that's how I stayed for a while. The dandelions grew so tall that no one could have seen me, if anyone even knew I was there. My clothes turned orange as if they'd oxidized, too. I was never bitten by anything. Never got sick. Never turned onto a syringe or a bullet shell. Never heard sirens. Never needed much but the tracks, and a blanket for nights when summer forgot me.

And then they said they were going to replace the tracks. That they were going to pick the weeds in which I rested. They were going to wash away the color that dyed my clothes. They were going to make the tracks somewhere people went through everyday. A trolley running through your bedroom. Think about it.

So for a month, I found something better to do than sleep. I began digging. Pulling. Prying, cutting, heaving. I had a crowbar, which was all I needed besides the tracks and the blanket. And so I started pulling up the rails. All night long. I'd find the most corroded, worn piece of metal and wedge my crowbar under it. I'd break loose the earth and pull. Pull until the nails popped and the tracks started to loosen. Until something snapped.

And then I would hold the tracks in my bare hands, orange and sometimes bloody. Sometimes blistered but always orange. When I was satisfied, I went to sleep where the tracks had been with a pile of metal against my chest. The dandelions masked my work and made it look like nothing had changed. But I was orange and now brown and black, too, because I held the metal against my chest. I was the only one who knew what was changing. For a month, I dug, pulled, pried, cut, heaved. For a month I slept in the tangles of dandelions and metal. For a month I was orange and black and brown and bloody.

Then finally they came. And they brought their equipment. They even brought cameras, news trucks. They brought cops. They brought the junkies from the projects to prove that the new trolley would benefit the junkies and their little junkie boys. And when they climbed through the weeds, they didn't notice at first. They kicked the rocks and stomped on the dandelions until they weren't anything more than bruised and naked stems. And then they found the orange and black and brown and bloody girl sitting on her pile of metal, and they realized they'd be putting a train through her bedroom and now it was time for them to go back to whatever it was they called home. Δ

AM APPY R.I.P. 2003(?) - 2011(?)

BY JAMES PAYNE

We are the only people,
in the world,
ever,
who will know what it was to wake up -
after champipple & weird sex -
and see a boy in pink, epicene,
vertically-integrated briefs,
chalk-outlined in
avocado & bonsai,
holding something.*

*It was nice.

BUSHWICK, NYC

BY JAMES PAYNÉ

On Food Stamp Yoga,
(1st of each month)
we eat like Marquises
and Comtes and Kings.
Kings and Queens of kale,
at the Court of Never Buy,
Never Sell.

3rd floor roommate
Étienne says,
‘Acid tabs,
bring reusable bags.
The inside of an avocado makes me feel glad.
It’s like everything I’ve always wanted but never had.’
Adding,
‘Oh Prosecco, just let go! À la Cour de Bushwick we never say no.’
And,
‘These things people think mean things are mean things, you-know-what-I-mean?’

On Food Stamp Yoga,
(1st of each month)
we love one another.

It is not tough.

CUSP CATASTROPHE

BY SUSAN YOUNT

There is now a curve of points in (a, b) space where stability is lost, where the stable solution will suddenly jump to an alternate outcome.

x = oatmeal coffee schedule request Christmas on Friday this year

a = private mother emotional just took the phone off forward at 8:27 a.m.

b = a woman who writes things to do at work

V = a few months before her death 11:29 press release

There was a house (x) on fire in the period (a) when condition (b) was fluid, frank and simple—
At that same moment (V), two divorces were arranged and a student wrote that she couldn't understand the woman's punctuation. It is buckling to hear.

x was like a regular day off on a holiday

a was like the 2:30 fix

b was born from an abandoned car

V was like having restless vagina syndrome

People carry-on baggage (x).

At 1:29 p.m. there is an automated message (a):

Congress (b) has passed the new 2009 stimulus package for small businesses. 11:30 a.m. beep—beep—beep—

At 11:29 p.m. there is another message (V): mommy where are you at the computer rubbing dirt sandwiches into her mouth.

HYPERBOLIC UMBILIC CATASTROPHE

BY SUSAN YOUNT

x = July 1996 Lallapalooza in Indianapolis sucked.
It rained on us and we didn't even stay for Metallica.

July 4th = I've got to work today. He's had 7 days off.
Plant shutdown. That would be nice but I get holiday pay.

V = Mute mute mute mute.

c = Housing contract. Sent 200 cash. Rest on Discover Card.

y = 2 people at an octagonal table words women love and don't look up you dick
for a week talked about it thought we were going to break only I did I deposited
100 in checking still have 57 in savings and I'm sending a credit card payment.
Shelly called I was at work she burned down her house she's been sober
for 40 days I might come home this Sunday a warrant an indent sometime
in August a breaking wave = mute mute mute mute.

b = Only I hate you otherwise you're a hero.

Or

b = Heat and farms and hepatitis at Frazoli's belongs to its owners.

Or

b = All women belly-button-ugly let loose their men too soon go there and
come-up grief feels too dangerous I see your Oldsmobile miracle the world
did this.

a = An insect on the white wall should I kill it too late.

After an hour conference call learning just the thing she asks *how do I use the
rate calculator?*

SPONTANEOUS SYMMETRY BREAKING

BY SUSAN YOUNT

Life is so complicated now three days before the wreck I dare not illustrate
 more than one example of the potential outcome in 1995 for fear
 you'll respond with something like
I'm not really sure what you're saying.

No really. Fuck you + what could mean less = 1995.

1995 = she is a ball of string a red tomato car wreck letter to her prison boyfriend
 turd painted gold hand tattooed negative zero sitting on top Radical Hill.

She sucks at math too otherwise she'd be a fucking physicist instead looked around
 found # ground four pages of letters never sent two pink ink never finished three teeth
 it only hurt because she swallowed or it broke like the windshield her face the wreck.

She left meat out to thaw you forgot.

I'm not sure which is more pathetic you trying to decide if the poem is blaming you
 or her and you and I and you or I again can't remember things or don't care paths
 meant her a store to buy cigarettes.

Thank God you are alone he said and then she knew he wasn't God = 03/30/1995.
 Her open window looked sad rose sunglasses twisted twigs seedlings grass by the roots
 sideways in a ravine she wasn't really name.
Oh yes I.D.

The police still looking she left her teeth eyebrow stuck in the windshield.



INSTRUCTIONS

BY STEPHANIE PLENNER

#1 How to Drop the Ball

Bring a ball to where you can be surrounded with sand.* This ensures an impression is made. Grip the ball firmly with both hands. Slowly raise ball above your head. After at least 120 seconds of tension, lower the ball to eye level and slowly release your grip. Allow ball to fall, bounce, and roll. Leave the ball and walk away.

#2 How to Burn a Bridge

After you have met your wit's end, the time has come to burn the bridge upon which you traveled.

Construct a replica of bridge using source material on hand. Hard work makes the burn most rewarding. At midnight of the next full moon, take bridge to an open, outside area. Strike a match. With lit match, set fire to remaining matchbook. Toss flaming matchbook onto the end of the bridge farthest from you and watch the fire approach you. Embrace the gradual increase of heat. Observe entire fire, from full blaze to ash.†

#3 How to Sever Ties

Lift wide end of tie. With a trusty pair of scissors, make a downward diagonal cut across raised end. Repeat this action for narrow end of tie. Allow severed parts to fall. DO NOT catch them. Someone else will eventually pick up the pieces. ‡

* Soft soil or freshly poured concrete is a good substitute.

† Only after laying a solid foundation, can a controlled burn be obtained. Always keep in mind the fragility of fire set.

‡ Type of scissors used will determine type of cut. If dull, child-safe scissors are used, cut will be jagged and tie will resist. The sharper the scissors, the cleaner the cut.

#4 How to Tie Loose Ends

When ready to go out of your way, begin the trek to tie up loose ends.

Obtain a length of rope two times longer than your physical height. Move in a direction opposite your daily route. For example, if you normally turn left, turn right instead. Passenger of the southbound train? Take it north. After you have moved beyond your comfort zone, locate a safe place to rest. Find a heavy, natural object around which you can ravel rope. Take care to keep enough slack to tie a knot. You are done when object is fully wrapped and a strong knot has been tied.*

#5 How to Turn Over a New Leaf

At dusk of the next new moon, go for a walk. When the starting point is out of eyesight, begin search for new leaf.

Be selective. If spring or summer, pluck a leaf from a tree with your right hand. If autumn, pick a leaf off the ground with your left hand. If winter, you may have to find a leaf at a local florist or botanical garden. In this seasonal scenario, obtain leaf by carefully using both hands.

With leaf in hand, casually walk three blocks north from wherever you are. Begin thinking of the purpose for this journey. Face cardinal direction most inspiring to you. If possible, face with back to the wind. Set leaf down. Breathe in and stand up. While exhaling, kneel back down and, using whichever hand you please, turn the leaf over. † Remain in position until leaf blows away, unless you choose to bring it home as a relic. Δ

* For further practice, after tying, toss your selected object into nearest body of water. Thoroughly wash hands.

† If this proves insufficient, turn self over.

SALT'NPEPPERPHOBIA

BY RICKY GARNI

The NYT says that a mouse that runs the equivalent of a 5K race in one hour every day will maintain a lustrous shine to coat without a hint of 'salt in pepper', have substantial vigor and pep, and will have

gonads that do not atrophy at 12 months of age while the mouse that does not run a 5K race every day will be suffered atrophied gonads and be as dead as a doornail by 12 months while yesterday

a mouse at the gym dropped a barbell on its toe and wondered why it would do such a thing and then realized it was for the love because this huge guy came up to it right afterwards and said OUCH that must

have REALLY hurt and then put his arm around his tiny mouse shoulder as he helped me into the ambulance

TO A PILLAR OF SOCIETY

BY WILLIAM DORESKI

You've locked your office corridor
yet given me a key. One room
crammed with files depicting you
as social and cultural pervert
of every mother's nightmare
remains sealed. Yet when I ask,

you open. In the warm green space
the files sigh like lungs. Photos
and affidavits prove that crimes
against the species still appeal.
You appear with farm animals
in compromising attitudes,

and with humans flayed or skinned
or in one instance beheaded.
You appear naked and bejeweled
and spangled with tattoos huge
as the great lichen of Norway.
Sworn testimony labels you

master of the chainsaw technique
for sparking orgasm after death.
Your victims love you despite lawsuits
squelched by blackmailed judges.
Some of them feature in photos
with sheep of startled expression.

Why trust me with this archive?
You smile like a stretch of railroad.
You'd never allow these files
to leave this windowless place
and you know I'd never betray you
with rumors too crude to credit.

I re-file the files and you lock
the room. I prowl down the corridor
and lock the outer door behind me
and hope that like Pharaoh in his tomb
you'll dream yourself to oblivion
no one will dare to disturb.

THE VOWELS I OFTEN MISTAKE FOR YOUR NAME

BY WILLIAM DORESKI

The dark growls in primal shades
 of gray and brown. Miles away,
 you sleep as deeply as magma.
 But above this corrupt small town
 the stars wince and suffer, and cries
 of owls linger much longer
 than they should. Rising early

from a dream of being lost
 between two small colleges,
 the highways wrinkling like flesh,
 I wonder how you'll survive
 the years after I retire and die,
 how you'll scrape my residue
 off your favorite tall black shoes.

Today a dinner with guests
 from the far side of the planet
 will challenge me to interpret
 my environment in startling terms.
 How can I explain a landscape
 of cringing villages and dour
 glacial hills? How can I plot
 the highways that separate as well
 as conjoin our failing egos?

Mandarin speakers won't understand
 unless I shape my speech to the will
 of the T'ang poets everyone loves,
 but I have to include you despite
 your absence because the cries
 of the owls contained the vowels
 I often mistake for your name.

Stars, owls, hills, and you sleeping
 so profoundly the earth shakes—
 and a landscape flakes away
 like paint, revealing a structure
 too simple for us to conceive.

LA GIUDECCA: VENETIAN FESTIVAL, IRISH INTERLUDE

BY CLAIRE MCCURDY

The Fiesta—the Biennale: An old friend from Nagasaki invited me to Venice to cover the Biennale Architecture Exhibition, and to stay with her on the island of La Giudecca. It was a wonderful opportunity for me. The theme of the exhibition was “People Meet in Architecture” and the 2010 director of the Biennale was a Japanese architect, Kazuyo Sejima.

La Giudecca is a small Venetian island which now boasts international features: a new hotel *and* NYC-style graffiti, “ALL CITY CREW.” La Giudecca has always had a fluid past. Its very name is a rumor, possibly a corruption of the Latin “Judaica” (“Judaean”), or Jewish ghetto.

It is a warm, enveloping village. It seemed as if everyone on Giudecca knew everyone else.

Some Giudeccan women were much in vogue. Elegant, etiolated (gladiator sandals, four-inch heels), swaying as if on the catwalk. Others in house-dresses, with missing teeth, gray hair worn in buns. Everybody held a cell phone in one hand and an unfiltered Camel cigarette in the other.

Conversation in the osteria focused on children, tourism, and everyone commented on the *aqua alta*, high waters. Venetians constantly exchange intense accounts of the stages and effects of the moon on the waters, like San Franciscans talking about The Big One—edgy and nervous.

The osteria was delightful, though the social occasion of the week was from an invitation my friend received inviting us to meet their Irish guests, visitors to the Biennale.

Who were our hosts, these Venetians? Artists, expats, former Bohemians, who had lived many years in Venice and were now landed gentry with children, land, palazzos.

The evening was almost exclusively Irish. No new Venetians need apply. And it was almost overwhelmingly stimulating. The theme of our conversation, to my ears, tended towards the firm establishment of the evening’s pecking order by means of demonstrated economic success and a talker’s ability to talk the hind leg off a donkey. The talk was entertaining, often deadly. We watched a documentary about bees swarming our host’s country estate, which provided a handy metaphor for the evening.

Our host, Robert, was English. Reserved, an eminent painter. A redoubt-

able woman academician, whose portrait he had painted, paid us a surprise visit that evening. We all had to shift our places at the table to accommodate her and her husband. Some of us ended up clutching oily, cold plates of clams on our laps, far, far away from the table, in Siberia.

Robert's wife, Alison, was an American. Blonde, attractive, and charming. She ran a gallery in Venice. She was the star of one of the documentaries, and it was her Italian country estate that was invaded by these bees. The film featured her family and friends as they attempted to cut out the combs from her house and lead the bees to a new locale.

And then there was my friend, G, who was my kind host who made the whole trip possible for me. Half Greek, half Italian, polylinguistic (six languages). Always accompanied by her little dog, enrobed in layers of sweaters like an English country woman. I remember this dog best as one valiantly battling a huge Nagasaki turkey.

The other four guests at the party were Irish folk. Architects, writers, filmmakers. Highly articulate, funny, fond of subtle insults. Fluent, dramatic, and ardent. (These three men, and one very pleasant, though reticent, woman architect, may have reserved some of their insults for me.)

I did have one point in my favor. I'm Irish on my father's side, no matter how many generations removed from the auld sod. I did not tell them my mother was British.

One of the Irishmen I met was a documentary filmmaker, Dylan. His opening lines to me were about his girlfriend, who was absent. About her, he leered, "She's like a bloke as a friend, but she cleans up nice, doesn't she?"

I learned from him that he had spent a two-week holiday in Japan with his girlfriend, and now he was a self-proclaimed expert on the country and its women. Despite the fact that there were two women at the party who had actually lived in Japan and might correct him, he nonetheless explained to us that any contemporary Japanese woman could be described as either Gucci, Geisha, or Goth.

However, Dylan's documentary about Japan was beautiful. The *ryokans* (country inns), brilliant autumn leaves; the temples and shrine festivals. Deeply nostalgic.

The next Irishman was more intent than our hosts on telling us of his assets. He carried photos not of his family, but of his stately home, his land, and his pigs. He had advised his wife to keep pigs to help keep her occupied. I had no pigs and no land, so I kept quiet.

I found that I had one thing in common with this man. I mentioned that

my favorite Venice Biennale architectural show had generally been numbered amongst the Biennale's best. "*Motet for 40 Voices*," based on the Renaissance choral music *Spem in alium nunquam habui* by Thomas Tallis.

From a technical standpoint, the show was stunning. Every one of the voices was individually microphoned, given its own speaker, and placed atop its own pillar. These pillars formed a semi-circle, which allowed the observer to listen to one singular voice or stand in the middle and hear all forty at once. Every voice, miked alone, stood on its own speaker and pillar in a huge semi circle. I said, it must have been quite a trick to get the amplifiers positioned exactly so that the ambient noise would not interfere.

The Irishman felt affronted. This was his *métier*, not mine. Or did I call myself a documentary film producer? I said, mildly, I sing. It didn't mollify him.

The third Irishman, whose name meant "The Little Monk" in Gaelic was a linguist and historian. He was also determined to outline his assets and his books. He asked what I'd been working on. I told him, mendaciously, the Biennale. He became agitated. How much of the Biennale are you covering? Who is your editor? What is your page count? I had apparently gotten under his skin. The party started to disintegrate.

When it was over, I thought that I might be able to emulate these Irishmen and women. Orate, opine, slip the deadly shiv into my speech. But I would be happy to let a decent interval pass before another such opportunity.

Coda: At the end of my week in Venice, G and I said goodbye over dinner. The food was delicious. I had some light pasta with arugula and tasted Prosecco for the first time. G's little dog took charge of the good-bye. She ran round and round, barking madly. She leapt up and licked my face. I finally broke away from her, said goodbye and headed for the water taxi. Δ

HOW TO LOCATE YOUR EQUIVALENT IN THE REAL WORLD

BY RICH IVES

I didn't know what I was looking for, but a clever little wallaby like Jonathan ought to have been able to help.

I knew that I was dreaming. Jonathan told me so. The sun was coaxing my eyelids to dance uncontrollably.

When I went to shut the window, my father died. I should have let someone else discover the way we misinterpret our lives.

A couple of very tiny sheep were dancing on my stomach. One of them was eating a hole in my navel. He danced and he ate until the hole was big enough for the other sheep to fall into. By the time the wound had healed, I was no longer just a possibility.

By this time I knew that I wasn't dreaming because Jonathan hadn't said a word. Jonathan was doing unexpected things to food and Jonathan was no longer uttering and Jonathan was no longer gardening. He was coaxing. Jonathan was partaking of restful silence.

When I pulled back the curtains, my father's dead body was smaller and clenched tight like a malnourished beggar. Jonathan told me I could find help at the market. Jonathan told me I could find consequences easily, but initiating occurrences would be more difficult.

You couldn't see all the children because some of them had died. You could taste the missing pieces of information, but you couldn't identify the flavors. They probably appeared new because the angel that lived there had stopped kicking pebbles into the weaklings' faces.

Then came the distant voice of a thunderstorm and it made me aware of the sand I had been walking on, not noticing how it had been accepting my feet but urging me to pay attention.

I noticed that some of the dead children had gone away and the angel had gone away and my father had gone away.

Jonathan had not gone away. I still didn't know what I was looking for, but I had realized I didn't need Jonathan to help me find it. I didn't need Jonathan to interpret the rain that finally arrived and I didn't need Jonathan to witness the return of my father.

The angel hadn't grown entirely useless. But I couldn't even conceive of the angel's future anymore. And the dead children hadn't just gone away.

They had eliminated vast pockets of empty behavior.

Mine, for instance.

So I tried to wake up and my father was there. I don't know if I woke or not, but the dead children were even further gone and there was nothing to remind me of who they had been. I couldn't even remember what an angel was, maybe I had invented one, but I remembered Jonathan, and I remembered my name was his name. I talked to myself about Jonathan and Jonathan went inside, and I felt him take hold of me, and this time I knew I wasn't dreaming. I told Jonathan to tell me I knew. Δ

THE ANGLE OF THE MOONLIGHT

BY RICH IVES

A man and a woman stood facing each other in an empty room. I suppose they could have been talking past each other to the darkness behind the broken window, but I heard nothing, saw only their faces, raw in the gestures of confusion, the room so deeply shadowed their bodies seemed to melt.

I was able to speak without a word and their heads turned. I cannot remember exactly what I said, but it made them look puzzled. The angle of my visibility shifted as they waited.

The woman lowered her eyes, as if there were something there at the man's feet to fill them. And there was. I was there, falling, but it belongs to no one. Or perhaps I have not arrived yet, and it's her expectations that have been lowered.

When you were there and forgot, when you stepped outside of yourself in front of her, when you let yourself, where was that in the night's eye?

When you chose to love her, you committed yourself to my bachelorhood.

I hadn't yet opened the skies that morning.

The home you made on my tongue is hungry enough for both of us.

Meet me in that room tonight; we can become like them and then we can become them. It will explain why we're here, but if you come, it will be because you do not need me. That's the welcome I ask for.

Now I must go. I am expected to appear before my neighbors, doing ordinary things. Most of them wouldn't know the difference, but I believe in appearances. Δ

SUNLIGHT, ANOTHER SHADOW

BY RICH IVES

The husks of October insects. Dragonflies. A dog panting in the late heat. An old man in the sunroom. An odor of figs and mushrooms. Outside, the wind-thrown years of dust. Inside, the slow sip of memory. And the passing magic of windows and doors. And always, one more detail . . .

A thrush bursts from the brush beside the goat path.

Smoke at dawn and the lights still marking the pier. The hour of fallen nests, leaves scuttling along the tiny sand dunes. Brittle thorns of lightning lengthen quickly across the sky. Weather won't be kind, but its indifference allows us all we need. Δ

IMPLEMENT FOR THE AERIAL DISTRIBUTION OF SPIDERS

BY RICH IVES

This is the way it happened. This odor is soft and caresses your arms and legs, but when it reaches your eyes, you suffer. It doesn't take much. Have you heard my heart that goes whirr? Have you seen my pride?

At the produce market, a circus performer was milking fruit. She was brown and rough, and pinky tan inside. Don't ask me how I know. When the fat little giant became distracted by chocolate, she was arrested. Thanks to prison, she finally broke away from her mother.

Then I had the nicest little nap. Asked to describe it, I would remember what it felt like when it left. You want to go away, but you don't really know where that is. You've never been there and it might not be better.

You write some things down. You've never been there either. You wonder who the narrator could be because you don't like to talk about yourself that much and it can't be you. You don't think you're important enough to be I, but interesting things are happening to I, you think, so you decide to suspend your disbelief that you can't be I. You think you're lying, but I seems to believe something's really happening to you.

I imagines story-like utterances, but I stifles them with my uncertainties.

Since I do not trust my experience, I decide to test it. I do not know if I have acquired as much liquid as I have expunged so I drink a large glass of water and try to enjoy it. It works. I enjoy it.

So I fill all the available containers with water and place them outdoors. I wait for them to develop. I don't drink them. I appreciate their attractions. I enjoy it.

Then I hunkered up my big bulky body against me and demanded attention. I made some more friends sleeping near the flooded cemetery. Toodles was confused. All his cuddles given away and not even a biscuit.

My husband wants me to diet, but I'm happier now. He loves me and doesn't expect much and that's what I give him. He invented a game in which vitamins were slipped from lip to lip until captured by wordless tongues that took them in and kept track of all the diseases they may have discouraged.

Yes, you want the pain to stop, but the absence of pain doesn't always mean comfort. I was on the way to should have been here yesterday and

tomorrow was already in the footprints. It was his freckles that did it. I didn't believe they could hide anything I couldn't live with.

I lift myself up out from under my weight and reattach the ladder receiver. It whirs quietly and politely ignores my odor. I climb quickly back into the unpoluted air beyond my recent experience. I take my recent experience with me, but I try not to look back fondly. The little party favors I made down there are wildly popular when sprayed with lavender. The ones I brought along are hatching. No one notices the texture of the components.

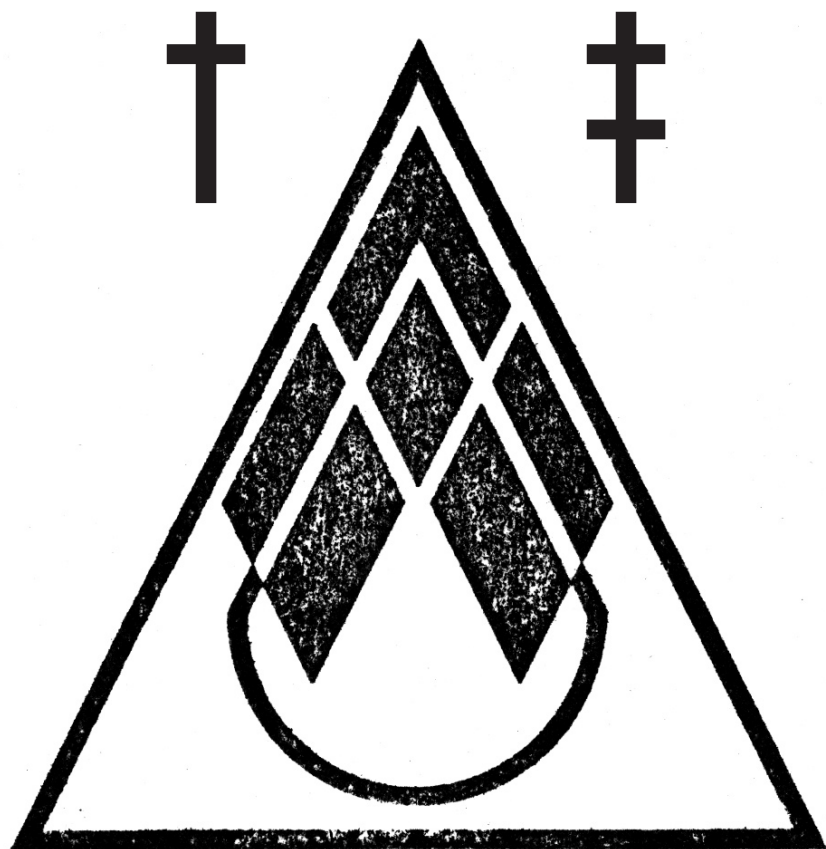
Even I was of the opinion that the ceiling tiles were meant to be ignored, not repeated. I was past them. I had grown superior to my former limitations.

I climbed and I climbed. I climbed out of the place that held me and into a position of availability. I was generous. I climbed further.

Way to the top.

Way, way to the top.

I wasn't even there when I got there it was so high. Δ



NO MINISTRIES

SEBASTIAN AND THE ACCUMULATION OF WORDS

BY JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

In front of Sebastian in the subway car, two women are speaking Spanish. They draw out the words, placing each one proffered from their tongues upon the plastic floor before them.

The pile grows.

Their accumulated syllables expand at their teetering tower's base, stray letters licking the polished shore of Sebastian's shoes.

Their words crawl along the floor,

interacting with each other's alternately harsh and hushed sounds, suffixes suffocating prefixes, prefixes surrounding the startled suffixes, and rules of grammar running in upon themselves.

The Spanish-speakers appear to be sisters:

Middle-aged, with rimless glasses and hairdos dyed to meticulously match the metamorphosing of the Autumn season.

Words fill the air, lodging themselves within the waiting ears of commuters, lending themselves to distortion.

Sebastian's pant-legs are covered with them.

He lowers his hand and heaves a teeming horde of subjects and adjectives into his wide-open mouth.

They taste like a story he'd read the week before.

Sebastian steps off the subway-car but carries those disparate words inside, digested in the dark recesses of their parts of speech.

Words crash back and forth, syllables seeking to express sound objectives, and language forms without him comprehending it.

Behind him, the two Spanish-speakers drown in a swirling sea of syllables filling up each crevice around them.

As the subway-car leaves the station, the women's syllables trail after them in an invisible string tied to nothing.

Sebastian can't see any more words.

He only feels his own dark storm, bustling frenetically within his mind, desperately wanting to escape into the daylight. Δ

SEBASTIAN AND THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

BY JONATHAN GREENHOUSE

Fleeing from the city,
 Sebastian stumbles upon a meadow of vibrant shoulder-length flowers,
 while sounds of a tango emanate from the undergrowth.
 “Would you care to dance?” he hears a man asking from somewhere inside.
 “I don’t know how to dance the tango,” Sebastian replies,
 looking dejectedly to where his unseen feet must be.
 “He wasn’t asking you,” a woman’s voice responds from below.
 “This isn’t a class for beginners.”

As the music swells from its invisible source,
 Sebastian sees dark shadows spinning dizzily through the parting flowers.
 “I’d like to learn how to dance like you,” he calls out,
 imagining himself in a dark suit with a tall woman pressed against his chest.
 “We haven’t started yet!” the man’s voice exclaims impatiently
 as a pair of bloated, disoriented cows
 stumble drunkenly through the bending flowers and into a clearing.

Sebastian crawls towards where the man’s baritone voice resonates,
 the music swelling as he hears the man intone “This is a private class,”
 and a sudden gust of wind rips out the flowers.
 Even the soil’s carried skyward,
 leaving a long asphalt strip around which grey rectangular buildings arise.

Sebastian looks around:
 There’s no woman, no man, and even the music’s stopped.
 He sits down, crestfallen,
 watching the process of a sprawling city imprisoning him again,
 the two overgrown cows walking beside him, ropes around their necks,
 an automatic vehicle prodding them along,
 steering them into the slaughterhouse. Δ

SEBASTIAN AND THE HEART SURGEONS

BY JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

Sebastian awakes completely naked in a small metallic cage.
All around him, chimpanzees move about, dressed in lab-coats,
poring through thick reams of data.
He's the only human in the room,
and the chimpanzees are grunting at each other as they nod their heads,
periodically staring at where he lies.
Their glasses slip down past their wide noses
as they jot down indecipherable notes with gigantic colored pencils.

Sebastian attempts shouting something,
tries running his quiet tongue over his cavity-filled teeth,
pressing the memory of it against the roof of his mouth,
but no intelligible sounds escape:
He has no tongue.

Every syllable he utters is incomprehensible babble.
Monkeys swing past him in pairs, conversing with their homologues,
confusedly holding up pictures of male anatomy
while grasping rusted surgical tools between their fur-lined fingers.
One of them forcefully slides its hands between the bars,
sticking Sebastian with a heavy needle,
and everything fades to black.

Upon regaining consciousness,
Sebastian's tied down to a wooden table, blurting out his nonsense,
as surgical chimpanzees peer at him and grin,
their protruding teeth in advanced state of decay.
They trace a red line upon the soft skin above his rapidly-beating heart:
This is where they'll make the incision.
While one of them clumsily raises a blood-stained cleaver,
Sebastian sighs with relief, knowing the travails of his hidden heart
will finally come to an end. Δ

SEBASTIAN, SAMANTHA AND LOVE'S COMPATILIBITLY

BY JONATHAN GREENHOUSE

Alone in bed with Samantha,
Sebastian measures the distance between his skin and his possible lover's.

She breathes heavily into his ear, uttering minute moans,
as his hands glide down her left breast and across her bare stomach.

"I don't think this is right," Samantha sighs, pressing herself against him,
his left arm squeezing her back to bring her closer.

"Then maybe we should stop," he says,
watching as she opens her eyes before rolling to the opposite side.

Silence,
except for the sounds of Samantha's dog panting at the edge of the bed,

Princess groaning and whimpering,
paws pushing against the covers covering Sebastian's body.

"What's wrong?" he asks, leaning in, his face caressing her,
his hands wrapped around her body trembling in the darkness.

"I don't think we're compatible," she says, her face turned away.

"Not compatible? How can we not be compatible? We haven't even..."

And his words trail off as he sees the moonlight shimmering in her eyes.

"You're so mysterious," she replies, uttering it as if it were an accusation.

Meanwhile, underneath the unconsummated bed,
four cockroaches perform their nightly choreographed square-dance.

A foghorn faintly floats in from a distant port,
and Sebastian imagines the sound of a flock of seagulls screeching.

"Incompatible," he whispers in wonderment,
separating himself from Samantha and turning upon his back.

On the paint-spackled ceiling, within a diaphanous forest of spider-webs,
someone has painted the words:

Yes: Incompatible, their preordained syllables only visible to him,
and suddenly Sebastian has no idea where he'll spend tomorrow night. Δ

SEBASTIAN'S ECSTASY IS SHORT-LIVED

BY JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

Within minutes of the telephone conversation
in which Samantha's told him she thinks it's best for them to part ways,

Sebastian heads directly to the nearest bar
and tries his hand at picking up the drunkest woman he can find:
Sebastian's well-aware the best way to recover from a recent break-up
is to immediately start dating again.
He knows this because he's been told to do so by his friends.

Sebastian talks about the stars, the trees in the forest, mountains of money,
adopting orphaned children, his latent ambition to be a famous pop-star,
and his intense hatred of anything un-American,
but none of this works,
as Sebastian only succeeds in getting violently drunk.

Upon returning home alone,
Sebastian vomits into the dish-filled, rancid kitchen sink
and proceeds to prepare himself a banana milkshake.
As a child, banana milkshakes always made him feel better,
but after drinking this one, Sebastian vomits again,
(appropriately) upon the throw-rug in the living room.

As his spinning head hangs precipitously over the toilet bowl,
the telephone rings, and it's Samantha,
who wants to give their relationship one more shot.
Sebastian profusely assents, hangs up the phone, and thinks to himself
he's never been so happy as he is in this moment,
as he vomits once again and passes out,
hitting his drunken, dizzied head against the cluttered nightstand. Δ

THE KID AND I

BY LUKE IRWIN

I fall asleep holding his left hand. It is wrapped in gauze, like the rest of his body. Over the gauze is a standard issue sock. I've welded it around his tiny wrist. The wrist is fixed in a brace extending to his nonexistent bicep. I am holding his hand because he will try to bite off his thumb. Nightmares, muscle spasms, and warped instinct have him gnawing his hands the moment a stray synapse brings them to his face. Welding lasts as long as his muscle and mind are asleep. The bedtime dose lasts two hours. He often awakens sobbing in pain. He endures what I imagine to be a slow fire burning its way through his musculature. He sobs. It is a strangled alarm to my uneasy sleep.

Morning. I stare at the ceiling and remember who we are. I cannot forget the reasons binding me to the morning and its ensuing patrol. It is comforting to remember that, at some point, living or dead, I will again sleep. I initiate wake-up: change gauze, change tape, check pumps, check dose, test lock, change armor, check patrol, check route. The apparatus hums with the pleasant morning address I gave it, a corruption of Wilbur:

I am the punctual rape of every blessed day. Good morning.

The kid whimpers. It takes time for him to journey back to reality after dreaming of pure thought. I possess the usual limitations. Since the kid has no control over his physicality, our communication is exclusively psychic. He "speaks" to me through literary allusion. Pure thought is untranslatable. We speculate whether his dreams constitute a greater reality.

Sonnet 120:

All this world well knows but none knows well
to shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

I activate the med pump. He screams and writhes on the ground, naked and flayed. Scars wiggle and contract like worms across his thin chest. Lear, Solzhenitsyn, Wiesel, Camus, Aristarchus. Concussions jolt us. Feed bag, blood bag, piss bag, vomit bag. I wrap him in gauze, get his pump activated. But the link is poor and its monitor complains like the punctured apparatus.

I send Winnie the Pooh, whisper: it's alright buddy. It's ok. Shrapnel makes havoc of supplies and waste, and the stench has me retching. I finish his gauze as he calms down and maintains the link. But I'm constantly brushing his hands from his mouth. I slather his blistered face with cream and hoist his featherweight body into the apparatus.

You're getting fat.

He sends Dumas. A close blast throws us into the cockpit shrieking with laughter. We reach lock quickly; sudden quiet is an uncanny reminder of the hell outside. I set us skimming as fast as the wounded apparatus can manage. We are easy prey until we return to the line. Four targets closing. I initiate maneuvers, but the apparatus is painfully slow.

Pure thought as death is beyond me. The totality is absolute and the nearest I can get is a light sleep. The kid can make death from any account manifest itself in a target. He has the ability to turn our battles into morbid poetry. The majority are quick, painless, clean, and abide by community stipulations. Napalm always pushes him over the edge. Crucifixion, Minotaur, Iphigenia, Jael.

Mindless hovercraft speed past to explode against the barren ridge ahead. The sensor shows no targets in range. I send Mother Goose and Little House on the Prairie. I can feel him start to relax, but I up the dose anyway and let him space.

We reach the line. Today it spans a nondescript, gray plain.

The apparatus lumbers into lock, and we are in the prep room. Screens chatter reports. I'm convinced body armor and skin have congealed into one and don't want to deal with it. Metal arms lift the kid from the apparatus to the table. I kill the pumps, check signals, prepare bath and shower. I scan his organs and bones then sigh. His body has to expel waste like anyone else. We both hate the changing table. I activate the med pump then slip him into the bath. Screams. Unadulterated pain and pure thought thinking pain so hard I have to sit down. But the bath is our favorite part of the day because his injuries are soothed. His little body is free and floating in warm medicine. He coos like a baby. I catch Stalky and Co.

Baudelaire: There is quietness and pleasure.

Dante: Abandon hope all ye who enter here.

The drugs make him severely high in time for bed. Mostly he is a blur of

Beatrix Potter. I suppress a laugh at a sudden image of the apparatus caught in Mr. McGregor's garden. I throw a towel over my shoulder and hoist his dripping body out of the tub. I throw him on the bed and rub down his new-grown skin as hard as I can, pausing only to blow raspberries on his crosshatched chest. His laughter fills the room then fades. Together we look at our icon of Elijah waiting for the ravens to feed him.

Our revels now are ended...
and each of us himself when no one was his own...

The dose buys him a few hours of legitimate sleep. Line, Apparatus, Lock, Pump, Dose, Pure Thought are all parts of a vocabulary of safety, a bridge of words designed for our sanity. But each is fragile and depends upon the others for coherence and meaning. Are we much different?

I think of tomorrow's patrol. I look at the apparatus and feel the pull. Standard oblivions are open if I want them: multi-dimensional porn, sentient information flows. I don't. I sit against the bed, up the dose, and send Kierkegaard to myself.

He's crying. I wake up.

I roll over to face him. Whatever is burning through his body, I am here. I adjust the breathing mask, and he awakens, tears in his eyes. I grab a venting hose and let out the gas in his stomach then cut the feeding line and quietly curse its majestic bleep. He sends Dumas.

I look at his wretched face and we both start to laugh. A disabled, seven year-old killing machine with his twenty year old chauffeur. We're startled, again, to find each other at the limits of sanity. A gray world, aboard a firebase at the edge of a dawn marked by time itself. We are in a perpetually overcast twilight, conquering a world devoid of vegetation. I slip into involuntary memory: We are ordinary people watching a sunrise; the apparatus a simple wheel chair.

Proust, he sends.

Proust. No good. You want Charlie?

I prop his body against the pads. Check the welding, thumb a tab. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* starts thought reading itself to us. His body is restless. We go in and out until battlehour.

The apparatus is armed. We walk into it and engage lock. The kid sits

swaddled in straps and belts like a strange, infant Christ: I came not to bring peace but the sword. I pull out matching kerchiefs: white against our armor. The kid needs one because he cannot control his saliva. I need one for luck. The sensors put us on route; the apparatus hums punctual rape.

We get an escort. A hovercraft squadron keeps its distance and masks its chatter. They are afraid of him. The sky seems to push against the ground. My armor is slicking with sweat. The kid is somewhere in pure thought. I take a wet hand from lock and hold it in front of me until it stops shaking. I put it back.

Diomed: Thinking what other daring deed he might accomplish.

Good.

The marines are engaged. I fire the apparatus into overdrive. We are a thin black blade hovering over the valley where they are fighting hand to hand. Dust, concussion bolts, blood bursts, long knives, predatory hovercraft. The sensor insists on targets: command wards on the left flank.

Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious season by the coming of this son of York. This is his joke.

A corruption of Levinas: is it righteous not to be. I'm never ready.
Tolstoy: Prince Andrew at Austerlitz. The kid is in earnest.

I drop us on the wards. He lets loose. Pure historical thought can cut both ways. The disintegrating ward is experiencing the effects of an ill-fated charge on a German trench in 1917. The kid can unleash death on larger scale this way because the truth of this kind of death is easily manufactured in the mind. Allusion guarantees death, but the intensity of the requisite thought is vastly increased in order to manipulate a target's belief in its own death. The benefit is that allusion is open-ended: the kid as interpreter delivers a hermeneutic of death to the mind he chooses.

A pure historical manifestation could wipe out any soldier near enough to conceptualize effects. The risk lies where historical event intersects actual fact. It is rooted in reality. Thus the kid's use of pure thought could bring hidden perspectives to the fore as it exposes hidden biases, causing a literal misfire. Ill-fated charges, the firebombing at Dresden, or the atomic bombs are all reliable weapons of mass attack. An example of a risky historical manifestation might be the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The kid knows what he's doing with the charge. The ward dissolves into

a pile of dead. They look like sleeping crustaceans. The kid stares. His head rolls forward. He drools onto his lap.

We keep moving for the next 20 hours. The dose activates and we slide across consciousness like ice. I piss myself twice, and the kid vomits. I have to set us down. I deactivate lock to pump out his stomach and throat. For once, our escort fences our position with concussion bolts. Napalm drops around us in long plumes. Sodom and Gomorrah.

Target Screen: Command thanks you.

It is hard for this information to appear meaningful.

Caked sweat on my armor: pillar of salt.

The ground is grey for miles. The PCs apparently decided against surrender. We land on a ridge and disembark. I let the kid watch the sunset. The light glows red on his ashen face. Crimson rays billow along smoky horizon, casting long shadows behind us. He begins to weep. The light fades. We reboard.

I awake later with his hand in mine. Δ

WHO IS THE KING OF BIRDS?

BY LAURA CARTER

Who is the king of birds?

Early shorn

fire illuminated

it must be poverty

or the bird-light of

all of the jobs

wholly taken on

half-taken in

at the money-changers' hands

or the dance-light of the yen

seen bothering light

of signatures

of Duchamp's umbrage—

maybe olfactory

or visual—

the last low light of the ear—

nothing's in the urinal of white...

XXYYZ

BY LAURA CARTER

The open eye
 dronta at what's
 conflict—
 the deer rolled over in the white roses
 I am a woman
 the war is always changing
 its feathers—
 at gymnasiums
 eidetic balladic
 in the circle of fifths
 putting its hands on
 drinking Coca-Cola in the
 rider's seat in the field—
 the bike was named Lightning
 and too askew—

I'm a woman
 with rouge lips
 coming out of caves—
 the boats are on the water now—
 my song straining to reach the pilots—
 ghost citizens of broken
 paragraphed essays
 turning stipple
 at the battery's E—

Was that the nadir
 in the half?
 I'm taken
 with my fins and blue
 swimming goggles
 I feel
 the cool water
 before abortion
 the chronicles of history subsuming

the Eden of and
 and in the will
 I will listen
 to him
 the busy old wise man of the sky—
 gently,
 gently now.



ANOBIUM ARTIST FEATURES PRESENTS

JOE MENO

"YOU WRITE AND THINGS SEEM TO START
NATURALLY ALIGNING THEMSELVES"

EVERYWHERE: THERE ARE CHAPELS

BY JOE MENO

Unfairly a great number of chapels have been born to a great number of unsuspecting parents. Lately, parents waiting in delivery rooms, expecting lovely, screaming babies—delicious pink flesh, irreducible pudgy digits, wet mouths erupting with both laughter and wails—are instead handed small white chapels bundled in tight blue blankets. Small white chapels with miniature steeples, miniature doors shuddering with colic-tinged cries, miniature stained-glass windows blinking out tears instead of round, doll-like eyes, chapels that demand to be held, tucked safely against their mother's breast, chapels that do not coo nor snuffle nor blink long eyelashes. Stunned, these young parents carry their new children home, sitting silent in the front seat of station wagons, these chapels—their sons or daughters going unnamed, as who had ever thought to name a building, a landmark, an unfamiliar bolt of architecture before?—resting unhappily in their mother's lap, while the father does his best not to talk, not to remark about anything, switching on the radio, searching through the stations, hoping for a popular song, something known, something they recognize.

At home, these unpracticed parents stand above newly-built cribs, at odds with this unfamiliar catastrophe, cautiously watching as their child—a tiny white chapel—flaps its front doors open as it yawns. The parents carefully place a rattle—decorated with pink asphodels—beside their child's triangular-shaped head, but the child does not seem interested in playing. It is dour; this child, it is fundamental, unnaturally serious. It turns away from the toy and begins to cry, and the sounds that emanate seem choral, like a dusty pipe organ thrumming in its unseen throat. It goes on crying. It cries and cries for days. Its intricate, stained-glass-window eyes become wet, then blurred, then foggy. The miniature pink flowers, planted in twin window boxes beneath each of the child's eyelids, all begin to wilt. Its steeple begins to sag and its front doors flutter back and forth. And then these young mothers quickly run from the small room, gasping, the back of their hand pressed to their open mouths. And these young fathers stand stock-still, eyes wide, gaping. Because this is not what either of them had dreamed of. This is not what anyone had planned.

Later, set upon by pubescence, these same children sit in dark corners of school auditoriums during formal dances and mixers. The triangular rise of

their steeples cast eerie shadows upon the sawdusted dance-floors. These children have grown to be sexless; they suffer, lacking the terrible incandescence of sex. Left alone in dark corners, these children quietly observe the laws of nature taking hold of other teenage girls and boys, girls and boys who stumble to the music, pressing pink palms together, echoing each other's embarrassment and amazement. Alone, these lesser children, these chapels, these pointy-headed youths—grown sturdy in their sense of solitude—offer silent sermons to cobwebs, to a discarded corsage, to a half-emptied punchbowl. In their heartache, they find a rusty nail beneath the abandoned bleachers and dream of driving it into the center of their palms, but stop short, recognizing it as heresy.

Adulthood passes in a hurry and, soon enough, these children, forever unmarried, forever separate, tethered only to the world by their precious faith, are asked to care for their ailing parents. These parents, who have grown infirm, who have lost the use of their legs, who only have the sniffles but no longer have any sense of who they are, who—forty, fifty years before—drove away from hospitals doing all they could to ignore the feathery pangs of disappointment, coming face-to-face with the inscrutability of their odd children, children who were not the children they had ever expected—now these same parents moan in the passenger seat, moan as they claw at the faded radio dial, moan as they search for something, some sound, some tune they still understand. But all there are now are gospel songs; popular singers courteously professing the mysteries of God and faith. Grown children drive, their steeples tilting, their stained glass windows-eyes trained on the road ahead, as silent as they've ever been. Together grown child and palsied parents pass gray schoolyards full of uniformed students, all penitently praying, pass municipal buildings whose flags are now colorless, whose flags now bear stark white crosses, pass playgrounds and parks that have been torn down, uprooted. Nothing lacks a religious insignia, no billboard, no street sign. Everything has been blessed by then. Finally the once-familiar composition of the local hospital passes into view. Grown children climb out of rusty station wagons—these grown children with their long steeples bowed, paint chipping along the eaves, shutters having gone gray—to unlock the passenger side door and lead their feeble parents off to the handsome white accommodations of geriatric wards. The arms of the young nurses almost look the same as they did fifty years before. These nurses offer soft, taupe blankets to the sets of confused parents, and lead them away, quietly cooing.

And everywhere, everywhere—I tell you—this is happening. Δ

A CONVERSATION WITH JOE MENO

Friday, May 6th, 2011. Late afternoon.

I had some contact with Joe Meno in April when I sent him an electro-message asking if he wanted an interview. He said yes. The month passed and I arrived early in Wicker Park, anxious to meet Joe and hear what he had to say.

We agreed to meet at Myopic Books, which is located in the left ventricle of Wicker Park. It was a sunny afternoon and lots of people were roaming the streets, most of them wearing sunglasses, skinny jeans and sending text messages about good weed. I was still in my business casual.

In preparation for the interview, I spent considerable time with two of his novels (*Hairstyles of the Damned*, *The Great Perhaps*) and two of his short-story collections (*Bluebirds Used to Croon in the Choir*, *Demons in the Spring*). Meno has written three books aside from these. His first novel, *Tender as Hellfire*, was published when he was 24. He has written three plays and won a number of awards, including the *Nelson Algren Award for Short Fiction* in 2003, the *Society of Midland Author's Award for Fiction* in 2005, and the *Great Lakes Book Award for Fiction* in 2009.

Joe Meno is a young-looking 37. Jeans, pearl-snap shirt, Chuck Taylors. An assuring and befitting look. I was impressed by the scope and depth of his literary knowledge. His conversation was professorial at times, though never pedantic (thank god). I imagine that his students at Columbia feel both challenged and encouraged by his passion for writing and literature.

We sat at a table upstairs, overlooking Milwaukee Ave. We could hear the occasional honking or swearing from outside, but these things were not related to our conversation. The bookstore was otherwise quiet, save a few bent-neck book-shoppers pretended not to eavesdrop. A pleasant afternoon meeting.

What follows is an abridged transcription of our interview. The full interview is available on our website at anobiumlit.com.

-Editor

Anobium: To outline or not to outline. Writing in the 21st century. Go.

Joe Meno: If I'm working on a novel-length material or a full-length play, I don't have an outline. I just have a list of scenes where I know A or B will happen at some point. I just don't know where. It's almost like matching characters and saying, "These two should be in a scene together." You write and things seem to start naturally aligning themselves.

A: What about *reading* in the 21st century?

JM: In a recent issue of *McSweeney's* [Issue 37], they had this list of data about reading. Basically, they said that there are more literate people today than there's ever been. There are more publishers. There are more books being published. All of this provides a really clear argument against the "book is dead" mentality. This is good news, especially with the prevalence of newer technology.

A: I just read an article that said almost half the population of Detroit is unselfconsciously illiterate.

JM: [Laughs] That's interesting. I don't know what to make of that. Maybe everyone is more literate except Detroit. And there are probably other pockets that are like that. But despite that, the fact that more people are reading gives me a lot of hope, even though writing is this really old form of communication.

What's interesting is that 150 years ago, people might have only read or owned a couple of books. Unless you were wealthy, you didn't have a library in your home. Books were expensive. So now, as a writer, you have easy access to books, film and television. Then there were those from my generation that grew up in the 70s with a VCR. This was important because you could watch a story over and over. This all means that people, especially those younger than 40, are very savvy about storytelling; tremendously more than they were a 150 years ago.

We experience so much more narrative, so we are faced with a lot of challenges. How do you surprise people? How do you give someone this narrative experience that feels both new and satisfying? You have to be inventive and surprising on one hand and at the same time, you have to fulfill these really basic, narrative choices.

My favorite books are the ones that measure the balance. They realize that people and their problems are familiar. They are old stories. A guy and a girl. A woman and her mother. A father and his son. Those relationships don't change. The conflicts that people have are pretty much the same, too. It's weird to think about.

A: These issues manifest in different ways but come from the same place.

JM: Right. Problems of lust or of rage. Ambition. Being trapped in a situ-

ation you can't control. The issues are the same. The way they get told is where writers like David Foster Wallace, Murakami, Barthelme, Pynchon or Vonnegut find new ways to present that material. That's really interesting to me. Old stories being relayed in new ways.

A: Is this how you approach storytelling?

JM: At least, that's what I'm trying to do. Those are the writers that I really admire and try to emulate. I think my last book [*The Great Perhaps*], even down to the opening lines, was influenced by *Slaughterhouse Five*. I started writing that book after the 2004 election. I was asking myself who else has come up with these questions about the country and the war, but I ended up going back to Vonnegut.

Slaughterhouse Five is incredibly inventive with its language and the way it's broken up. I've never read another book that uses humor in this completely new way to deal with these ghastly things. There's the idea that if you write about war, you can only write about it journalistically, or 'realistically.' It's rewarding to see Vonnegut treat it differently.

A: Did this treatment influence the research you did about the American "Internment Camps" for *The Great Perhaps*? Because the existence of these camps is so ignored, their idea seems fictive. People sometimes talk about the Japanese camps, but you spend a lot of time talking about the German ones.

JM: It's true. There was actually a facility here in Chicago because there were so many Germans and Italians. Eventually the government built Crystal City in Texas, which was just one big 'camp.' When I started doing research, I realized that I'd never heard of this stuff.

I felt like these camps were essential to put into the novel because I wrote it at the height of the Iraq war. The people who were for the war often hoisted the banner of WW2, using it as an example of why we needed to intercede. However, film, TV and comic books have turned WW2 into this incredible mythology. We have this idea that we were brave and valiant, but when you do the research, you find a totally different story. The British were begging us to intercede. It wasn't that Roosevelt was against it; the American public was against it.

The Great Perhaps is almost an argument for the complexity of war, and why it's okay that things get complicated. It's actually kind of beautiful that you can't reduce everything to a CNN headline or a bumper sticker.

A: Does this complexity lend itself to the strangeness of how we write about things?

JM: I think about this a lot. There are a lot of writers I love who play with form and structure. Barthelme, Vonnegut, Pynchon, Barth. Even though these guys are dealing with serious questions, they deal with them in a way that seems almost playful.

And then there was this tone of self-seriousness that settled in during the 80s. Writers like Raymond Carver and Amy Hempel. They were realistic, but not very funny. They are very straightforward. That tone seems to have become standard for literature since then.

I have a real problem with this idea of 'realism.' It completely discounts what you day-dream about or imagine throughout the day. We have these quick flashes of memory of fantasy, and weird juxtapositions between what you're thinking and how it's manifested in someone walking down the street. 'Realism' actually seems more abstract than everyday life. In fact, the roots of fiction go back to exaggeration. Like in the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad*.

A: Do you think this tendency to strangeness is somehow connected with life in Chicago?

JM: Chicago is a really interesting city of contrasts, as if these dynamics lend themselves to exaggeration. Everything in Chicago is like this, from the weather to the contrasts between race and class.

A lot of this tendency also comes from the tradition of storytelling. Chicago is an immigrant town, which really influences how people experience life in Chicago. Irish, Italians, Eastern Europeans. You have these Italian storytellers, everyone from Dante to Italo Calvino, who embrace this inventiveness and surrealism. Then you have the Polish and Eastern European tradition, which is influenced by Biblical texts, folk-tales, and old-wives tales.

Because of this influence, it seems like this city, and even the Midwest, is predisposed to exaggeration and absurdity. A bunch of great writers in Chicago are following this. Over the last ten or fifteen years especially, a lot of really talented writers have come out of this Chicago tradition. Patrick Somerville, for example, has two great short-story collections which reflect this. Adam Levin and Jessie Ball are others. The stuff these guys are writing is completely different than, say, the stuff that's being published in *The New Yorker*. I'm excited by this. It makes me proud to live here.

A: A big part of your earlier career was writing for *Punk Planet*. Outside of that, however, do you feel that your approach to writing as a career has been influenced the eponymous ‘punk rock ethic’?

JM: Yes, definitely. I would see these bands playing shows in basements and VFW halls, selling records out of the trunks of their cars. That world made more sense to me than buying a record from a chain store. Buying a record out of someone’s car or at a small show felt more meaningful.

And then, for some reason, when I started putting books out, I completely negated all of these experiences I had. I thought, “This is literature, this has to be serious.” I thought it could only be done that one way. I had to remind myself that everything in art is based on opinion. Just because some people don’t like it doesn’t mean that everyone won’t like it. So you just follow your own instinct, and know that your instinct is just as valid as anyone else’s.

When I was writing for *Punk Planet*, I interviewed Dan Clowes [*Ghost World*, *Eightball Magazine*]. He has had a very accomplished career. He said something that stuck with me. He said that, at any given time, it can be guaranteed that at least 2,000 people in the world will be interested in what he’s doing. They’re not always the same 2,000, but at any given moment, he knew that he could put something out and people would receive it.

I think about this a lot. So much of the music and literature that influenced me wasn’t made to connect with everybody. It’s really specific. When I wrote *Hairstyles of the Damned*, I thought that there would maybe be a hundred people who would ‘get it,’ and then it turned out that all of these kids really got into the book because it is so specific. It was a big lesson for me. If you make this thing and you know it’s not going to be for everybody, but that a small group will really love it, then you’ll feel infinitely more satisfied.

A: Speaking of early influence, you seem to write fairly lucidly about youth and teenager-hood.

JM: *Hairstyles* has that. *The Great Perhaps* has that. Even the first part of *The Boy Detective* has that. One of the reasons for this is my age. When I started writing in my 20s, I wrote about the things that happened in my teen years, because those were the big events in my life. Now that I’m 37, I’m finally starting to write about stuff that happened in my 20s. It seems that it takes me about ten years to figure out what happened. [Laughs]

Another reason for this is that my favorite stories almost always feature

these late-adolescent or adolescent protagonists. Faulkner has this whole run of books with young, male protagonists; *Intruder in the Dusk*, *The Sound and The Fury*, *The Unvanquished*, *Knight's Gambit*. There is something dramatic about that age. You have similar experiences as you age, but none of it seems to have stakes as high as when you were young.

Again, this goes back to this old tradition of storytelling. All folk tales, all fairy tales, and a lot of myths feature teenage or young protagonists. They're vulnerable. If you put a man in the woods with a trail of breadcrumbs, it's not the same. That age lends itself to drama. A lot of people like Thisbe [a 12 year-old girl] from *The Great Perhaps*. She's the rawest and most emotive character in that book. After a reading I did in Kankakee, this person came up to me and said that they named their cat Thisbe.

A: That's the best compliment you can receive.

JM: [Laughs] Yeah. And I think the reason that people are interested in Thisbe is because everything is very 'life-or-death' with her. The swings between her tones and moods are so much more intense than those of adults. Adults have critical moments, but don't seem to swing, say, from outlandish humor to lust to severe supplication. If everything is going right, the older you get, the arcs get more controlled.

A: Music seems to be another major theme of your work. Even outside of punk rock, the category of 'music' almost seems like a character in your books. Would you agree?

JM: My first experience with writing anything was when I wrote these really bad heavy metal songs or punk songs in high school. Later, those songs became poems, and then those poems became short stories. By the time I was in my 20s, I was writing longer pieces, but in my mind, I've connected music and the written word. All of my books, in some way, are almost like translations of pieces of music. Not lyrically, but more a translation of a tone or mood.

In *How the Hula Girl Sings*, I'm trying to capture Johnny Cash with a murder ballad or country noir in mind. *Hairstyles* has short chapters that follow the structure of a mixtape. Here's the sad chapter and then here's the funny one. There's even a chapter that's written backwards, like you're rewinding a tape. I was really trying to play with that idea.

The Great Perhaps was me trying to interpret *The White Album* by the

Beatles. On that record, it feels like they throw their arms around all of 20th-century music. That's what I wanted that book to feel like; a diversion from the present to the past. That record has four different voices on it. I wanted the book to have that same quality.

When I listen to a song, I see things that people do. I don't know why, that's just how my mind works. There are a lot of short stories I've written that are influenced by specific songs. After I've written 50 or 100 pages of a novel, I start finding the musical equivalent to what I'm doing.

A: What else have you been working on?

JM: There is a guy producing a musical of *The Boy Detective Fails* in Washington D.C., and that show will be opening at the end of August [2011]. That's very exciting. I'm finishing up a new novel, and hopefully that will be out in the next year or two. I've been writing a lot of short stories, different magazines have approached me. I'm doing a lot, and the way it works out is that I'll have a big project, and then do a bunch of short stories in-between to keep my imagination going.

Also, earlier this year, I finished an adaptation of *The Great Perhaps* for film. It's been optioned and hopefully we'll get a director. I would love to see it on film. I've had two short stories that were adapted in the past. One of them was a story from *Bluebirds Used to Croon in the Choir*, and the other was a chapter from my first book, *Tender as Hellfire*. One premiered at Sundance and the other was at Tribeca.

A: Any last words before the tape runs out?

JM: Good luck. Δ

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VOLUME ONE: END

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Laura Carter lives and works and writes in Atlanta, GA.

Jennifer L. Collins is a tattooed animal lover who accidentally followed her love of poetry right into an addiction to teaching.

William Doeski roams the forests of New Hampshire in hopes of befriending bears. (*williamdoeski.blogspot.com*)

Eric Evans the proud recipient of the 2009 Geva Theatre Center Summer Academy Snapple Fact Award. (*inkpublications.com*)

Ricky Garni cannot speak French but enjoys saying, “Yes, I speak French,” in English. (*tortillaexmachina.blogspot.com*)

Jonathan Greenhause’s poetry has appeared in many literary reviews, including this one, and he chats often with Sebastian, who is hiding at an undisclosed location.

Luke Irwin is hunting lions in Seattle with Oriane. (*thirdcardinal.wordpress.com* & *pifmagazine.com*)

Rich Ives hopes to visit Virginia City, Montana, where one of his antecedents is hung every summer in celebration of the arrival of frequently misunderstood anniversaries.

Eddie Jones is eagerly awaiting The Carter IV.

J.S. MacLean takes about seven years to completely replace his molecules.

Claire McCurdy lives in northern Manhattan with two charming rescued cats and in her spare time she is perfecting the mojito.

Bethany Minton recently spent ten summer days in the Sonoran desert in a very special mid-construction historical hotel across the parking lot from a Church’s Chicken.

Thomas Mundt likes that shirt on you. (*dontdissthewizard.blogspot.com*)

Ben Nardolilli is an intellectual jack of all trades in Arlington, VA.
(*mirrorsponge.blogspot.com* & *idontwannabeamanchild.blogspot.com*)

James Payne is an artist and writer who splits his time between Columbus, OH, and Chicago, IL. (*banalization.blogspot.com*)

Stephanie Plenner hails from Chicago, IL and facilitates indirectly with words and pictures. (*stephanieplenner.com*)

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Susan Yount is madam of the Chicago Poetry Brothel and editor of *Arsenic Lobster*.

ABOUT THE MASTHEADERS

Sarah E. Docherty is an unfinished melody.

“Mary J. Levine” has no “real connection” to “Vermont” because she “doesn’t exist” and she prefers Chicago.

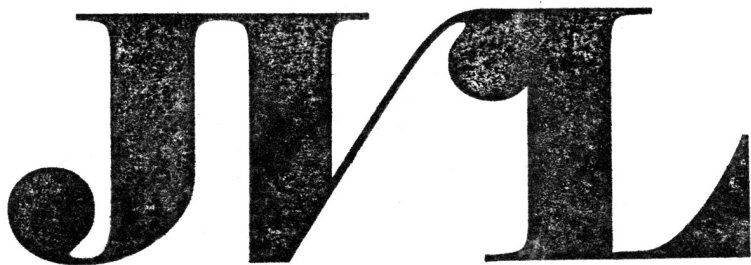
Jon-Erik Means is the foremost expert on Guyanese Braille Calligraphy and can currently be seen in the space between his door and his desk, embedded.

Lauren Monokian is a writer from Chicago and works for the communists.

Benjamin van Loon is an unlicensed metaphysical cosmonaut who drinks his water straight out of the Chicago River. (*benvanloon.com*)

Michael Zielinski is an amateur acoustic ecologist with a penchant for the avian vocal organ.

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ABOUT THE PRINTER

Anobium: Volume 1 (Summer 2011) was printed with the help of **Louis Segovia** and **United Graphics, Inc.**, located in the quiet, farm-side hamlet of Mattoon, IL. (*unitedgraphicsinc.com*)

ABOUT ANOBIUM

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Anthropoda

Class: Insecta

Order: Coleoptera

Infraorder: Bostrichiformia

Superfamily: Bostrichoidea

Family: Anobiidae

Subfamily: Anobiinae

Genus: *Anobium*

Colloquially, the bookworm, even though it's a beetle.

Alternately, as a conceptual entity, *Anobium* is the brainchild of Benjamin van Loon and "Mary J. Levine," who doesn't exist. *Anobium* is a Chicago-based, independent publisher specializing in the assemblage and presentation of strange, surreal and exceptional literature.

We are always interested in new writing and beginning new conversations. You can find submission information online at anobiumlit.com/guidelines.

Additional copies of *Anobium: Volume 1 (Summer 2011)* can be obtained online at anobiumlit.com/purchase or out of the back of that guy's minivan. You can also send a check for \$12 payable to Benjamin van Loon at the mailing address below.

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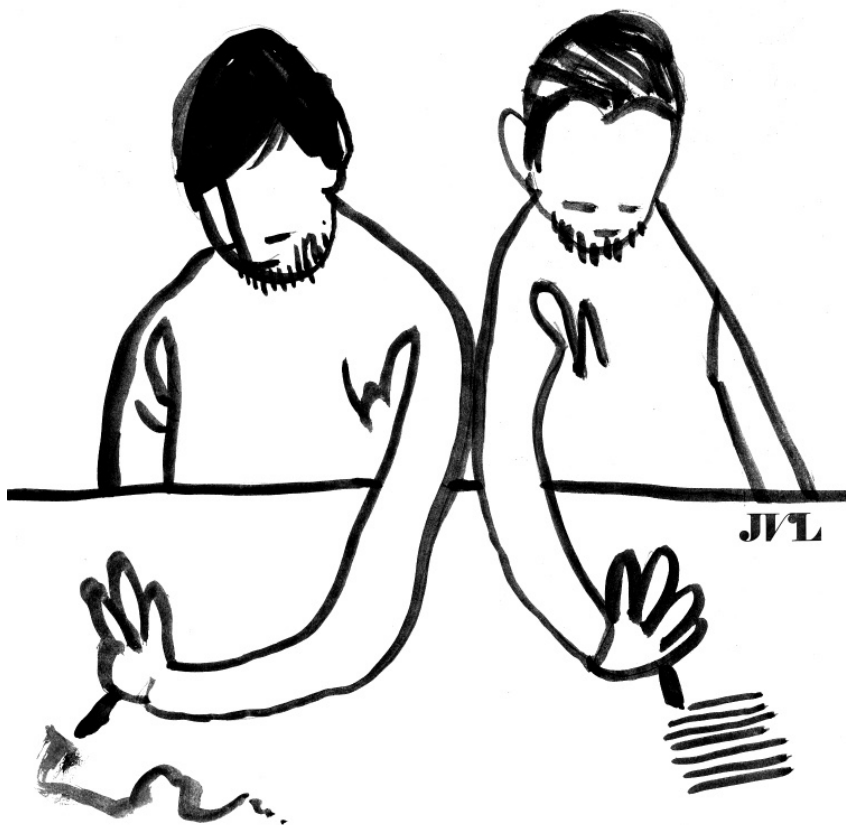
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